No. 15.] [Price 2d.

ON THE APOSTOLICAL SUCCESSION IN THE ENGLISH CHURCH.

When Churchmen in England maintain the Apostolical Commission of their Ministers, they are sometimes met with the objection, that they cannot prove it without tracing their orders back to the Church of Rome; a position, indeed, which in a certain sense is true. And hence it is argued, that they are reduced to the dilemma, either of acknowledging they had no right to separate from the Pope, or, on the other hand, of giving up the Ministerial Succession altogether, and resting the claims of their pastors on some other ground; in other words, that they are *inconsistent* in reprobating Popery, while they draw a line between their Ministers and those of Dissenting Communions.

It is intended in the pages that follow, to reply to this supposed difficulty; but first, a few words shall be said, by way of preface, on the doctrine itself, which we Churchmen advocate.

The Christian Church is a body consisting of Clergy and Laity; this is generally agreed upon, and may here be assumed. Now, what we say is, that these two classes are distinguished from each other, and united to each other, by the commandment of God Himself; that the Clergy have a commission from God Almighty through regular succession from the Apostles, to preach the gospel, administer the Sacraments, and guide the Church; and, again, that in consequence the people are bound to hear them with attention, receive the Sacraments from their hands, and pay them all dutiful obedience. I shall not prove this at length, for it has been done by others, and indeed the common sense and understanding of men, if left to themselves, would be quite sufficient in this case. I do but lay before the reader the following considerations.

1. We hold, with the Church in all ages, that, when our Lord, after His resurrection, breathed on His Apostles, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost,—as My Father hath sent Me,

so send I you ;" He gave them the power of sending *others* with a divine commission, who in like manner should have the power of sending others, and so on even unto the end ; and that our LORD promised His continual assistance to these successors of the Apostles in this and all other respects, when He said " Lo I am with you," (that is with you, and those who shall represent and succeed you,) " alway, even unto the end of the world."

And, if it is plain that the Apostles left successors after them, it is equally plain that the Bishops are these Successors. For it is only the Bishops who have ever been called by the title of Successors ; and there has been actually a perpetual succession of these Bishops in the Church, who alone were always esteemed to have the power of sending other Ministers to preach and administer the Sacraments. So that the proof of the doctrine seems to lie in a very small space.

2. But, perhaps, it may be as well to look at it in another point of view. I suppose no man of common sense thinks himself entitled to set about teaching religion, administering Baptism, and the LORD's Supper, and taking care of the souls of other people, unless he has *in some way* been called to undertake the office. Now, as religion is a business between every man's own conscience and GOD ALMIGHTY, no one can have any right to interfere in the religious concerns of another with the authority of a teacher, unless he is able to show, that it is GOD that has in some way called and sent him to do so. It is true, that men may as *friends* encourage and instruct each other with consent of both parties ; but this is something very different from the office of a Minister of religion, who is entitled and called to " exhort, rebuke, and" " rule," " with all authority," as well as love and humility.

You may observe that our LORD Himself did not teach the Gospel, without proving most plainly that His FATHER had sent Him. He and His Apostles proved their divine commission by miracles. As miracles, however, have long ago come to an end, there must be some *other* way for a man to prove his right to be a Minister of religion. And what other way can there possibly be, except a regular call and ordination by those who have succeeded to the Apostles ?

3. Further, you will observe, that all sects think it necessary that their Ministers should be ordained by other Ministers. Now, if

this be the case, then the validity of ordination, even with *them*, rests on a *succession*; and is it not plain that they ought to trace that succession to the Apostles? Else, why are they ordained at all? And, any how, if *their* Ministers have a commission, who derive it from private men, much more do the Ministers of our Church, who actually do derive it from the Apostles. Surely those who dissent from the Church have *invented* an ordinance, as they themselves must allow; whereas Churchmen, whether rightly or wrongly, still maintain *their* succession not to be an invention, but to be God's ordinance. If Dissenters say, that *order* requires there should be some such *succession*, this is true, indeed, but still it is only a testimony to the mercy of CHRIST, in having, as Churchmen maintain, *given us* such a succession. And this is *all* it shows; it does nothing for *them*; for, their succession, not professing to come from GOD, has no power to restrain any fanatic from setting up to preach of his own will, and a people with itching ears choosing for themselves a teacher. It does but witness to a need, without supplying it.

4. I have now given some slight suggestions by way of evidence for the doctrine of the Apostolical Succession, from Scripture, the nature of the case, and the conduct of Dissenters. Let me add a word on the usage of the Primitive Church. We know that the succession of Bishops, and ordination from them, was the invariable doctrine and rule of the early Christians. Is it not utterly inconceivable, that this rule should have prevailed from the first age, everywhere, and without exception, had it not been given them by the Apostles?

But here we are met by the objection, on which I propose to make a few remarks, that, though it is true there was a continual Succession of pastors and teachers in the early Church who had a divine commission, yet that no Protestants can have it; that we gave it up, when our communion ceased with Rome, in which Church it still remains; or, at least, that no Protestant can plead it without condemning the Reformation itself, for that our own predecessors then revolted and separated from those spiritual pastors, who, according to our principles, then had the commission of JESUS CHRIST.

Our reply to this is a flat denial of the alleged facts on which it rests. The English Church did *not* revolt from those who in

that day had authority by succession from the Apostles. On the contrary, it is certain that the Bishops and Clergy in England and Ireland remained the same as before the separation, and that it was these, with the aid of the civil power, who delivered the Church of those kingdoms from the yoke of Papal tyranny and usurpation, while at the same time they gradually removed from the minds of the people various superstitious opinions and practices which had grown up during the middle ages, and which, though never formally received by the judgment of the whole Church, were yet very prevalent. I do not say the case might never arise, when it might become the duty of private individuals to take upon themselves the office of protesting against and abjuring the heresies of a corrupt Church. But such an extreme case it is unpleasant and unhealthy to contemplate. All I say here is, that this was not the state of things at the time of the Reformation. The Church then by its proper rulers and officers reformed itself. There was no new Church founded among us, but the rights and the true doctrines of the Ancient existing Church were asserted and established.

In proof of this we need only look to the history of the times. In the year 1534, the Bishops and Clergy of England assembled in their respective convocations of Canterbury and York, and signed a declaration that the Pope or Bishop of Rome had no more jurisdiction in this country by the word of God, than any other foreign Bishop; and they also agreed to those acts of the civil government, which put an end to it among us [1].

The people of England, then, in casting off the Pope, but obeyed and concurred in the acts of their own spiritual Superiors, and committed no schism. Queen Mary, it is true, drove out after many years the orthodox Bishops, and reduced our Church again under the Bishop of Rome, but this submission was only exacted by force, and in itself null and void; and, moreover, in matter of fact it lasted but a little while, for on the succession of Queen Elizabeth, the true Successors of the Apostles in the English Church were reinstated in their ancient rights. So, I repeat, there was no revolt, in any part of these transactions, against those who had a commission from God; for it was the Bishops and Clergy themselves, who maintained the just rights of their Church.

[1] Vid. Collier, Eccl. Hist. v. ii. p. 94.

But, it seems, the Pope has ever said, that our Bishops were bound by the laws of God and the Church to obey *him*; that they were subject to him; and that they had no right to separate from him, and were guilty in doing so, and that accordingly they have involved the people of England in their guilt; and, at all events, that *they* cannot complain of their flock disobeying and deserting them, when they have revolted from the Pope. Let us consider this point.

Now that there is not a word in *Scripture* about our duty to obey the Pope, is quite clear. The Papists indeed say, that he is the Successor of St. Peter; and that therefore he is Head of all Bishops, because St Peter bore rule over the other Apostles. But though the Bishops of Rome were often called the Successors of St. Peter in the early Church, yet every other Bishop had the *same* title. And though it be true, that St. Peter was the *foremost* of the apostles, that does not prove he had any *dominion* over them. The eldest brother in a family has certain privileges and a precedence, but he has no power, over the younger branches of it. And so Rome has ever had what is called the *primacy* of the Christian Churches; but it has not therefore any right to interfere in their internal administration; not more of a right, than an elder brother has to meddle with his younger brother's household.

And this is plainly the state of matters between us and Rome, *in the judgment of the Ancient Church* also, to which the Papists are fond of appealing, and by which we are quite ready to stand or fall. In early times, as is well known, all Christians thought substantially alike, and formed one great body all over the world, called the Church Catholic, or Universal. This great body, consisting of a vast number of separate Churches, with each of them its own Bishop at its head, was divided into a number of portions called Patriarchates; these again into others called Provinces, and these were made up of the separate Dioceses or Bishopricks. We have among ourselves an instance of this last division in the Provinces of Canterbury and York, which constitute the English Church, each of them consisting of a number of distinct Bishopricks or Churches. The head of a Province was called Archbishop, as in the case of Canterbury and York; the Bishops of those two sees being, we know, not only Bishops with Dioceses of their own, but having, over and above this, the place of precedence among the Bishops in the same Province. In like man-

ner, the Bishop at the head of a Patriarchate was called the Patriarch, and had the place of honour and certain privileges over all other Bishops within his own Patriarchate. Now, in the early Christian Church, there were four or five Patriarchates; e. g. one in the East, the Head of which was the Bishop of Antioch; one in Egypt, the Head of which was the Bishop of Alexandria; and, again, one in the West, the Head of which was the Bishop of Rome. These Patriarchs, I say, were the primates or Head Bishops of their respective Patriarchates; and they had an order of precedence among themselves, Rome being the first of them all. Thus the Bishop of Rome, being the first of the Patriarchs in dignity, might be called the honorary Primate of all Christendom.

However, as time went on, the Bishop of Rome, not satisfied with the honours which were readily conceded to him, attempted to gain *power* over the whole Church. He seems to have been allowed the privilege of *arbitrating* in case of appeal from other Patriarchates. If, e. g. Alexandria and Antioch had a dispute, he was a proper referee; or if the Bishops of those Churches were at any time unjustly deprived of their sees, he was a fit person to interfere and defend them. But, I say, he became ambitious, and attempted to *lord it* over God's heritage. He interfered in the internal management of other Patriarchates; he appointed Bishops to sees, and Clergy to parishes which were contained within them, and imposed on them various religious and ecclesiastical usages illegally. And in doing so, surely he became a remarkable contrast to the Holy Apostle, who, though inspired, and an universal Bishop, yet suffered not himself to control the proceedings even of the Churches he founded; saying to the Corinthians, "not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy; for by faith ye stand." 2 Cor. i. 24. This impressive declaration, which seems to be intended almost as a prophetic warning against the times of which we speak, was neglected by the Pope, who, among other tyrannical proceedings, took upon him the control of the Churches in Britain, and forbade us to reform our doctrine and usages, which he had no right at all to do. He had no pretence for so doing, because we were altogether independent of him; the English and Irish Churches, though in the West, being exterior to his Patriarchate. Here again, however, some explanation is necessary.

You must know, then, that from the first there were portions of the Christian world, which were not included in any Patriarchate, but were governed by themselves. Such were the Churches of Cyprus, and such were the British Churches. This need not here be proved; even Papists have before now confessed it. Now, it so happened, in the beginning of the 5th century, the Patriarch of Antioch, who was in the neighbourhood of Cyprus, attempted against the Cyprian Churches what the Pope has since attempted against us; viz. took measures to reduce them under his dominion. And, as a sign of his authority over them, he claimed to consecrate their Bishops. Upon which the Great Council of the whole Christian world assembled at Ephesus, A.D. 431. made the following decree, which you will find is a defence of England and Ireland against the Papacy, as well as of Cyprus against Antioch.

"An innovation upon the Rule of the Church and the Canons of the Holy Fathers, such as to affect the general liberties of Christendom, has been reported to us by our venerable brother Rheginus, and his fellow Bishops of Cyprus, Zeno, and Evagrius. Wherefore, since public disorders call for extraordinary remedies, as being more perilous, and whereas it is against ancient usage, that the Bishop of Antioch should ordain in Cyprus, as has been proved to us in this Council both in words and writing, by most orthodox men, We therefore decree, that the Prelates of the Cyprian Churches shall be suffered without let or hindrance to consecrate Bishops by themselves; and moreover, that the *same rule shall be observed also in other dioceses and provinces every where, so that no Bishop shall interfere in another province, which has not from the very first been under himself and his predecessors*; and further, that, if any one has so encroached and tyrannized, he must relinquish his claim, that the Canons of the Fathers be not infringed, nor the Priesthood be made an occasion and pretence for the pride of worldly power, nor the least portion of that freedom unawares be lost to us, which our Lord Jesus Christ, who bought the world's freedom, vouchsafed to us, when He shed His own blood. Wherefore it has seemed good to this Holy Ecumenical Council, that *the rights of every province should be preserved pure and inviolate, which have always belonged to it, according to the usage which has ever obtained*, each Metropolitan

having full liberty to take a copy of the acts for his own security. And, should any rule be adduced repugnant to this decree, it is hereby repealed."

Here we have a remarkable parallel to the dispute between Rome and us; and we see what was the decision of the General Church upon it. It will be observed, the decree is past *for all provinces in all future times*, as well as for the immediate exigency. Now this is a plain refutation of the Romanists on their own principles. *They* profess to hold the Canons of the Primitive Church; the very line they take, is to declare the Church to be one and the same in all ages. Here then they witness against themselves. The Pope *has* encroached on the rights of other Churches, and violated the Canon above cited. Herein is the difference between his relation to us, and that of any civil Ruler, whose power was in its origin illegally acquired. Doubtless we are bound to obey the Monarch under whom we are born, even though his ancestor were an usurper. Time legitimises a conquest. But this is not the case in spiritual matters. The Church goes by *fixed laws*; and this usurpation has all along been counter to one of her acknowledged standing ordinances, founded on reasons of universal application.

After the Canon above cited, it is almost superfluous to refer to the celebrated rule of the First Nicene Council, A. D. 325, which, in defending the rights of the Patriarchates, expresses the same principle in all its simple force and majesty.

"*Let the ancient usages prevail*, which are received in Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis, relative to the authority of the Bishop of Alexandria; as they are observed in the case of the Bishop of Rome. And so in Antioch too, and other provinces, let the prerogatives of the Churches be preserved."

On this head of the subject, I will but notice, that, as the Council of Ephesus controlled the ambition of Antioch, so in like manner did St. Austin rebuke Rome itself for an encroachment of another kind on the liberties of the African Church.

Bingham says,

"When Pope Zosimus and Celestine took upon them to receive Appellants from the African Churches, and absolve those whom they had condemned, St. Austin and all the African Churches sharply remonstrated against this, as an irregular practice, *viola-*

ting the laws of unity, and the settled rules of ecclesiastical commerce; which required, that no delinquent excommunicated in one Church should be absolved in another, without giving satisfaction to his own church that censured him. And therefore, to put a stop to this practice, and check the exorbitant power which Roman Bishops assumed to themselves, they first made a Law in the Council of Milevis, That no African Clerk should appeal to any Church beyond sea, under pain of being excluded from communion in all the African Churches. And then, afterwards, meeting in a general Synod, they dispatched letters to the Bishop of Rome, to remind him how contrary this practice was to the Canons of Nice, which ordered, That all controversies should be ended in the places where they arose, before a Council and the Metropolitan[1]."

Thus I have shown, that our Bishops, at the time of the Reformation, did but vindicate their ancient rights; were but acting as grateful, and therefore jealous champions of the honour of the old Fathers, and the sanctity of their institutions. Our duty surely in such matters lies in neither encroaching nor conceding to encroachment; in taking our rights as we find them, and using them; or rather in regarding them altogether as trusts, the responsibility of which we cannot avoid. As the same Apostle says, "Let every man abide in the same calling, wherein he is called." And, if England and Ireland had a plea for asserting their freedom under any circumstances, much more so, when the corruptions imposed on them by Rome even made it a duty to do so.

I shall answer briefly one or two objections, and so bring these remarks to an end.

1. First, it may be said, that Rome has withdrawn our orders, and excommunicated us; therefore we cannot plead any longer our Apostolical descent. Now I will not altogether deny, that a Ministerial Body might become so plainly apostate, as to lose its privilege of ordination. But, however this may be, it is a little too hard to *assume*, as such an objection does, the very point in dispute. *When* we are proved to be heretical in doctrine, then will be the time to begin to consider, whether our heresy is of so grievous a character as to invalidate our orders; but, *till then*,

[1] Bingh. Antiq. xvi. 1. § 14.

we may fairly and fearlessly maintain, that our Bishops are still invested with the power of ordination.

2. But it may be said, on the other hand, that, if we do not admit ourselves to be heretic, we necessarily must accuse the Romanists of being such; and that therefore, on our own ground, we have really no valid orders, as having received them from an heretical Church. True, Rome may be so considered now; but she was not heretical in the primitive ages. If she has apostatized, it was at the time of the Council of Trent. Then, if at any time, surely not before, did the Roman Communion bind itself in covenant to the cause of Antichrist[1]. But before that time, grievous as might be the corruptions in the Church, no individual Bishop, Priest, or Deacon, was bound by oath to the maintenance of them[2]. Extensively as they were spread, no Clergyman was shackled with obligations which prevented his resisting them; he could but suffer persecution for so doing. He did not commit himself in one breath to two vows, to serve faithfully in the Ministry, and yet to receive the superstitions and profanities which man had, in course of ages, introduced into the most gracious and holiest of God's gifts. On the contrary, we may say with the learned Dr. Field, "that none of those points of false doctrine and error which Romanists now maintain, and we condemn, were the doctrines of the Church before the Reformation constantly delivered or generally received by all them that were of it, but doubtfully broached, and devised without all certain resolution, or factiously defended by some certain only, who as a dangerous faction adulterated the sincerity of the Christian verity, and brought the Church into miserable bondage[3]." Accordingly, acknowledging and deploring all the errors of the

[1] The following is from the Life of Bernard Gilpin, vid. Wordsworth's Ecclesiastical Biography, vol. iv. p. 94. "Mr. Gilpin would often say that the Churches of the Protestants were not able to give any firme and solid reason of their separation besides this, to wit, that the Pope is Antichrist.... The Church of Rome kept the rule of faith intire, until that rule was changed and altered *by the Council of Trent, and from that time it seemed to him a matter of necessitie to come out of the Church of Rome*, that so that Church which is true and called out from thence might follow the word of God.. But he did not these things violently, but by degrees."

[2] The Creed of Pope Pius IV., in which every Roman Priest professes and promises to maintain all the errors of Popery, was only imposed *after* the Council of Trent.

[3] See Field on the Church, Appendix to book iii. where he proves all this. See also Birkbeck's Protestant's Evidence.

middle ages, yet we need not fear to maintain, that after all they were but the errors of individuals, though of large numbers of Christians; and we may safely maintain, that they no more interfere with the validity of the ordination received by our Bishops from those who lived before the Reformation, than errors of faith and conduct in a priest interfere with the grace of the Sacraments received at his hands.

3. It may be said, that we throw blame on Luther, and others of the foreign Reformers, who *did* act without the authority of their Bishops. But we reply, that it has been always agreeable to the principles of the Church, that, if a bishop taught and upheld what was contrary to the orthodox faith, the Clergy and people were not bound to submit, but were obliged to maintain the true religion; and if excommunicated by such Bishops, they were never accounted to be cut off from the Church. Luther and his associates upheld in the main the true doctrine; and though it is not necessary to defend *every* act of fallible men like them, yet we are fully justified in maintaining, that the conduct of those who defended the truth against the Romish party, even in opposition to their spiritual rulers, was worthy of great praise. At the same time it is impossible not to lament, that they did not take the first opportunity to place themselves under orthodox Bishops of the Apostolical Succession. Nothing, as far as we can judge, was more likely to have preserved them from that great decline of religion, which has taken place on the Continent.

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